METAMORPHIC CHRYSALIS: EMBODYING MINDFULNESS IN TRANSFORMATION

by

Rachael L. Shaw

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The thesis of **Rachael L. Shaw**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Abby Fiat	, Chair	**March 1, 2012** Date Approved
Ellen Bromberg	, Member	**March 1, 2012** Date Approved
Satu Hummasti	, Member	**March 1, 2012** Date Approved

and by **Stephen Koester**, Chair of the Department of **Modern Dance**

and by Charles A. Wight, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

In this research, I explore the relationship between mindfulness and transformation embedded within the creative process. I draw on the discipline of modern dance, psychological research on the relationship between environment and human behavior, Creative Systems Theory, Bartenieff Fundamentals, and yogic philosophy as theoretical frameworks for my creative research. I define mindfulness as the ability to be mentally, emotionally and physically present in the moment. I propose that only through mindful awareness can embodied transformation take place.

For the creative research of my thesis, I choreographed two pieces, *Firewall* and *Chrysalis,* to examine mindfulness and transformation. These pieces were made in succession, first *Firewall,* which was performed at the Graduate Thesis Concert in November 2011 and then *Chrysalis* which was performed in December 2011 at an alternative concert, 'Bang: An Inter-Audience Performance Experience.'

Through the process of making the first piece, *Firewall,* I began to explore being in a present state as a means for change and for recognizing when that change needs to occur. *Chrysalis,* also a group piece, served as an extension and development of the discoveries about mindfulness and transformation I made during and after the creation of *Firewall.* In it, I was able to embody and thus more deeply understand the issues I had been grappling with in *Firewall.*

Through this creative research, I came to a fuller understanding of the importance of being present in the process of transformation. I discovered that focusing on the moment could enable embodied change. I also discovered that mindfulness is a practice and not something that can be taken for granted.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I explore the relationship between mindfulness and transformation embedded within the creative process. I define mindfulness as the ability to be mentally, emotionally and physically present in the moment. I draw on the discipline of modern dance, psychological research on the relationship between environment and human behavior, Creative Systems Theory, Bartenieff Fundamentals, and yogic philosophy as theoretical frameworks for my creative research. I propose that only through mindful awareness can embodied transformation take place.

I first became interested in mindfulness and its effects on transformation while preparing my senior project as an undergraduate dance major at Virginia Commonwealth University. As the senior project was a culmination of 4 years of composition and choreographic training in the dance program, it was a very rigorous process. When a piece did not meet the choreographic or performance standards set by the faculty, the student would be asked to delay the performance of their project until the next semester or even the next year. This delay often resulted in a student being required to graduate a semester or a year later, which happened to at least one student every year.

The fear of being one of those students caused me a great deal of anxiety. Instead of living with my fears, I hid them and tried to pretend they didn't exist. As a result, during the process of making my senior piece, I was worried about what might happen in the faculty showing and as a result, I lived more in the future than the present. I began having heart palpitations and my hands would shake so badly that I couldn't dial numbers on my phone. These symptoms appeared when I felt anxious, but also at times when I felt relaxed. I would be eating dinner with friends and suddenly my hands would be shaking uncontrollably and I would feel like I couldn't breathe.

I went to the doctor and was given anti-anxiety medication, which treated the symptoms but not the cause of the anxiety. The shaking, heart palpitations, and shortness of breath were gone, but the medication merely covered the cause and did nothing to solve the underlying problem—that I was constantly living in fear of the future, worrying about the outcomes rather than being present in the moment.

After my senior project was performed, I decided to discontinue taking the medication. However, a few months later, I began experiencing anxiety symptoms again. This was when I discovered yoga. As I practiced, concentrating on breath, I noticed that feelings of anxiousness and irritability lessened and the physical symptoms of anxiety abated. I started practicing breathing when I began to feel the physical and emotional symptoms of anxiety. After a few hours, I would feel less anxious. It would be like a hazy fog had lifted. The shaking, heart palpitations, and shortness of breath would be gone. Concentrating on my breathing aided me in being present in the moment and thus not as concerned about what might happen in the next day, week, month or year. As a result, my physical and emotional state transformed—I was no longer in the midst of a panic attack,

but rather calm and clear-headed. I began to realize that I didn't need to avoid my fears to get through the day, but instead, could come into relationship with them, live in them and even learn from them. Fear wasn't the problem, my inability to come to terms with my fears was.

This first-hand experience peaked my interest in the importance of mindfulness as a means to transformation, not only on a personal level, but a social and cultural level as well. Contemporary culture in the United States tends to be goal-oriented and future-focused. We plan and schedule out our days, weeks and months, sometimes down to the minute. We jump from one thing to another so quickly that we have very little time to allow ourselves to be present in the activity in which we are partaking. It is rare in our society for people to allow for embodied and intentional time before they move onto their next activity or appointment. This future-oriented focus can result in a lack of mindfulness. Especially now, with the rise of digital technology and social connectedness, we can be physically present in one place, while mentally and emotionally present in another. Writing an email on a smartphone while riding the city bus or posting a status update to Facebook while waiting for a performance to begin are now the status quo.

My original hypothesis was that, as a culture, we would be more mindful if we valued transitions and transitional spaces. I believed that by being present in transitions, we would be prepared for our next task. This hypothesis took for granted that people were fully present in the main events—such as meetings, rehearsals, or classes. Through my creative research I discovered that mindfulness in the "main actions" could not be taken for granted. In fact, being mindful in all aspects of life actually allows

transformation to take place. Instead of worrying so much about the future, the practice of being fully present in the moment and trusting that moment, allows for transformation to occur when the time is right. By being fully present and aware, the possibilities for change are clearer and easier to grasp. The downfall of being future-oriented is that the opportunities of the moment can be lost and the entirety of the experience short-changed.

In my thesis research, I hoped to discover not only how mindfulness can lead to transformation in the choreographic process, but also what methods might be useful in establishing and staying present in the moment. For the creative research of my thesis, I choreographed two pieces, *Firewall* and *Chrysalis,* to examine mindfulness and transformation. These pieces were made in succession, first *Firewall,* which was performed at the Graduate Thesis Concert in November 2011, and then *Chrysalis,* which was performed in December 2011 at an alternative concert, "Bang: An Inter-Audience Performance Experience."

The first piece, *Firewall,* was a group piece that I began under my original hypothesis, which focused on creating a piece that could serve to prepare and transition audience members into the main concert. Through the process of making the piece, I began to explore being in a present state as a means for change and for recognizing when that change needs to occur.

The second piece, *Chrysalis,* was also a group piece, which served as an extension and development of the discoveries about mindfulness and transformation I made during and after the creation of *Firewall.* In it, I was able to embody and thus more deeply understand the issues I had been grappling with in *Firewall.*

In this paper, I begin with a treatment of *Firewall*. First, I discuss the making of the piece that became *Firewall.* As such, I begin with my original thesis ideas about preparation and transition. I then detail how through the creative process, the focus of my thesis changed from preparation to mindfulness in transformation. I also elaborate on realizations and discoveries I made about myself, my tendencies in the creative process, and how they fed into the refinement of my thesis topic and the piece itself.

I then discuss how these revelations were the impetus for the creation of *Chrysalis.* I discuss how the choreographic process deepened my own understanding of the role of mindfulness in both the creative process and in transformation. Next, I reveal the implications of my discoveries within the entirety of the process to my future as a teacher and choreographer. Finally, I discuss the impact I imagine this research has had on my own ideas of mindfulness and transformation in the choreographic process and will have on me as a human being.

CHAPTER 2

FIREWALL

Through the process of making the piece that eventually became *Firewall,* my thesis topic shifted from the use of preparation as a means of transition to the role of mindfulness in transformation. I became aware of my own tendencies and fears within the creative process and discovered that being present in the moment not only aided in abetting those fears, but also encouraged necessary change. Thus, the making of *Firewall* tracks my own realizations about the importance of mindfulness in transformation through the creative process.

The Making of Firewall

As stated above, I began *Firewall* under the auspices of my original hypothesis: that transitions and transitional space could serve to prepare the audience for the performance to come and that with this preparation, the audience would be more likely to enjoy the performance. The basis of my preliminary research was a study conducted by Paul B. Paulus of the University of Texas at Arlington and Robert W. Matthews of the University of Texas Health Science, which demonstrates that people tend to react and

handle situations in a more positive manner when they have been prepared for what is ahead of them. For example, subjects navigating a complex maze within crowded and noisy conditions performed better when given preparatory information about the conditions they would be working in, than those who were not given that information. (Paulus, 1980, pp. 8-9). Translating this to the performance environment, I believed that if audience members were prepared for the performance before it began, they would be more likely to have a positive experience.

As such, the piece I planned to make was to be a part of the concert, "Bang: An Inter-Dimensional Dance Concert," a collaboration between myself and a colleague, Katherine Sailer. My piece would take place in the lobby space as an introduction to Sailer's evening length piece, and would serve as a preparation for Sailer's themes and ideas about theater space.

As research for how to best prepare the audience for her piece, I interviewed Sailer about what she had planned. She described her work as "mythic, animalistic and ritualistic with an undertone of gritty, postmodern humor" (K. Sailer, personal communication, August 19, 2011). She planned to involve the audience in a 360 degree performance experience imagining the dancers and the audience would occupy the same space, intermingling and blurring the lines between audience and performer.

Using Sailer's ideas as inspiration, I began planning my own preparatory piece. When attending a dance concert, the kind of 360 degree performance Sailer planned is not what audiences expect. Rather, they expect to be in a specific kind of environment generally modeled after the proscenium stage. So, my main goal for this piece was to introduce the audience to a 360 degree performance experience by beginning my piece in

an environment close to the typical performance space and then slowly transition the audience into a 360 degree performance environment.

Typical Performance Spaces

The proscenium theater is a common theater structure and is what the typical audience member would likely expect when planning to attend a performance. In a proscenium space, the performers and the audience members are separate entities, which rarely have direct contact with one another. Originally the proscenium stage was constructed with a proscenium arch, which reinforced the separation of the performer and the audience. In his book *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* Marvin Carlson notes, "…the proscenium arch removed the performers from the intimacy [with the audience] and physical dimensionality [of earlier theater designs]" (1993, p. 140). The proscenium arch was like an invisible line, which encouraged the performance to stay on the stage, and the audience to observe the action but not take part in it.

While the physical arch of the proscenium stage may not be present in the more modern theater, the architectural and social division between the audience and performer still exists. For example, in a typical theater space, the audience is arranged in parallel rows facing the stage, encouraging the stage as the focal point. In their article, "The Theatre as Interaction and as Interaction Space," Lenelis Kruse and Carl F. Graumann liken the audience experience in such a theater to prison:

> A person spending two or three hours without an interval, separated from the gangway by numerous seats and imprisoned by rows of legs in a seat that is at most reasonably comfortable and that is rigid and firmly fixed forwards-looking, is so rigidly fixed that he is already condemned to being a recipient. This rigid forward alignment is further reinforced by the optical decline from the darkness of the auditorium to the light of the stage

> and by the acoustical decline from a conventional silence … to the spoken word and sound on the stage. (1977, p. 155)

While this is an extreme example of the relationship of the audience to the performance space, it explains how the very set-up of the physical environment (seating, lighting, acoustics) of the theater places audience members in a position to receive.

The implication of placing audience members in an environment which encourages reception of information only is that they will be in a state of *conscience témoin* or ready to receive, but not to interact (Kruse & Graumann, 1977, p. 154). This is not to say that there is an inherent problem in discouraging audience and performer interaction. Rather, it is to exemplify that the typical audience members' expectations of their own separation from the performer are reinforced by the typical theatre's architecture. Therefore, most audiences might not be prepared to participate in the type of performance that Sailer planned.

Using this research, I planned that my piece would transition the audience from a more traditional set-up, with the audience and performer as separate entities, into an interactive, almost carnival environment where the audience and performers would mingle. I hoped that this would transition the audience from preconceived ideas about what a dance concert might be like and prepare them for Sailer's more 360 degree performance concept. I also hoped that the carnival atmosphere at the end of my piece would prepare them for Sailer's mythic and gritty tone.

Because I had concrete ideas about how the piece should begin (performer and audience separate) and how it should end (performer and audience intermingling), I had decided the basic structure for the piece very early in the rehearsal process. I imagined the piece would start with a section that would have the rigid, isolationist feel of Kruse

and Graumann's description of the typical theater experience. Then, I would end the piece with a section where each performer would have their own character to embody and each would be interacting with the audience in their own way. I imagined a carnival-esque atmosphere, with bright colors and imaginative costuming.

The Beginnings of the Carnival

To begin, I selected my dancers based on this carnival atmosphere I imagined for the ending. I knew that I wanted a wide range of personalities and movement signatures, hoping that would make a variety of characters for the ending. I chose to work with Katherine Adler, Jenessa Frampton, Claire Valene Bagley-Hayes, Tanja London, and Laquimah Van Dunk because each has a very different and individual movement signature. For instance, Van Dunk's movement signature tends to be very direct, but soft, and she uses her entire kinesphere when moving. On the other hand, Hayes tends toward gestural movement that stays close to her body with an inner focus, not reaching into the outside world.

To develop this carnival-esque part of the piece, I asked the dancers to come up with archetypes or metaphors of themselves so that the characters we created for each performer would come out of their own personalities. I hoped that by encouraging them to embody these archetypes or metaphors of themselves, they would be embodying styles of movement that they would already be comfortable with. This way, when asked to amplify their characters, it would be easier for them since the qualities they would be magnifying would already be a part of their movement palette.

Once the dancers had chosen an archetype for themselves, I had them write in detail about their archetype or metaphor. I encouraged them to write stories, basic ideas,

adjectives or even draw a picture—whatever felt appropriate for them to begin to explore the ideas contained within the characters they had chosen. Next, I had them improvise embodying their archetypes or metaphors. After they had an opportunity to move their archetypes, I asked them to expand their writings based on their embodiment of the character. I hoped this deep investigation of their archetypes or metaphors would give them a fuller understanding of the characteristics they were trying to portray.

Over the next several rehearsals, we continued to play with the archetypes. They improvised with their archetypes in partnerships and groups to investigate how their archetypes would interact with another individual. I asked them to make a short phrase for their archetype—using the characteristics they had moved and written about.

After several rehearsals, the dancers were still struggling to exaggerate their archetypes or metaphors. For example, Frampton's phrase was a very simple dance phrase. In watching the phrase I had no idea what kind of archetype or metaphor she was expressing. While it was not important that her specific archetype be identifiable to the audience, it was important that the archetype have very clear movement signatures and at this point, Frampton's did not. After talking with her, I realized that while she was using very specific movements to embody her character, the quality of the movement or the way in which she performed the movement gave no clue into those ideas. She was relying solely on the mechanics of the movement to convey the characteristics of her archetype. The same was true with all of the other dancers. To help with this, I had them sound by using words or noises to emphasis the movement and emotional quality that different parts of their phrases required. The sounding helped to illuminate and exaggerate specific movement qualities.

The Beginnings of the Beginning

Transitions I

At the same time I was creating the ending of the piece, I also began work on what I planned for the beginning of the piece. I believed that *Transitions I,* a piece I choreographed while doing preliminary research for my thesis, had the isolating tone fit for the beginning of the piece. (*Transitions I* was choreographed to prepare the audience for a concert in which isolation was an over-arching theme.) For the performance of *Transitions I,* the audience was placed in a single row of chairs on the two longer sides of the rectangular room facing into the center. The dance happened in the center of the space, with the audience viewing the piece from the two sides of the space.

Each of the performers had their own track, which ran from one end of the space to the other lengthwise. It was in this "track" that each performer danced his or her part. They did not acknowledge one another or the presence of the audience. The space was dimly lit with desk lamps set-up on the floor and one stage light. The result was a dim, isolating space where performers and audience alike felt alone, even though there were many other people in the space. This environment seemed the perfect atmosphere to illustrate Graumann and Kruse's description of the proscenium theatre, which I wanted for the beginning of this new piece.

Modifications

Through the choreographic and rehearsal process, basic elements and structures evolved from *Transitions I* to fit this new piece. For example, in *Transitions I,* the performers began to spread throughout the space—in almost complete stillness. In the

original piece, we planned to begin the piece once we had a critical mass of people seated around us. We imagined that people would slowly trickle in as they arrived. However, our stillness, combined with the dark environment, actually prevented audience members from entering the space. Because the dancers were occupying the space that the audience would need to walk through in order to sit, no one wanted to come into the room, afraid that they would be interfering. Keeping this in mind, I decided to begin *Firewall* with the dancers offstage, so that the space would be empty. In addition, I imagined that the space would be well lit and then as the piece began, the lighting would slowly dim. That way, the audience would have the opportunity to converse and settle in before the piece officially began.

With my dancers, I worked on the build of the section. Knowing that I needed to build in abstract movement because that type of movement was a big part of the final carnival section, I decided the piece should begin with slow walking. This slow walk would build first to a fast walk, then to a run, and finally into abstract movement. To refine the timing and flow of this section, I watched the section several times after adding new movements or making changes so that I could make thoughtful changes based on what I saw and felt.

Showings

Armed with my isolating beginning and carnivalesque ending, I began showing the piece to my committee. For the first showing, I presented the newly-structured beginning and an improvisational score using the carnival characters we had developed.

After this first showing, as well as in subsequent showings, my committee expressed concern with how the dancers transitioned from walking into abstract

movement. While I agreed with their concern, I became frustrated as I worked to remedy the situation. I tried several different methods of having the dancers transition into abstract movement, from the movement quality to the specific movement to where the abstract movement began within the timeline of the beginning section. Even though we changed the section several times, it didn't seem like it was really making *sense* within the piece. Not knowing how to resolve this issue, I decided to continue working on the section while building and reinforcing the structure of the piece.

In order to reinforce the structure of the piece, from isolation to carnival, I decided to integrate caution tape as a metaphor for the fourth wall. I decided that the dancers would be oblivious to the caution tape in the first section, the walking section. The walking section would then transition into the dancers becoming aware of the tape and interacting with it. To fill in the middle of the structure of the piece I had the dancers adapt their archetype and metaphor phrases to interact with the caution tape. This interaction would lead to the eventual tearing down of the tape. I felt that having the dancers literally break down and apart the caution tape would aid in changing the environment from a typical performance to one where the audience and performer were integrated. Finally, this breakdown of the caution tape would lead into the carnival and the audience intermingling with the dancers while they performed their full archetype phrases.

As I continued to show the sections I was working on to my committee, they felt that the phrases interacting with the caution tape were too representational. The dancers phrases were representing the idea of the caution tape as a barrier, instead of truly living and embodying it. For example, the way in which the caution tape phrases were

introduced often made it seem as if the dancers was saying, “And now we’re going to explore the caution tape,” or “And now we’re going to break it down.” In their book *Art and Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking,* David Bayles and Ted Orland discuss this phenomenon in art-making. They state, “There is a difference between meaning that is embodied and meaning that is referenced” (1993, p. 55). The way in which my choreography interacted with the tape, merely referenced the meaning of the tape, rather than embodying it. The dancers were doing the actions, but because the actions seemed to really only support one simplistic interpretation, they made the piece flat.

Based on the feedback from my committee on the representational nature of the dancers’ relationship with the caution tape, I began brainstorming other possible ideas and interpretations of caution tape. I began noting where and when I saw caution tape in the world at large, like construction sites or dangerous areas, and listing how people responded to the caution tape: i.e., avoiding the area enclosed by the tape, peering curiously into the taped off area, or even walking through the area if there didn’t seem to be any actual danger.

After creating this list, I went into rehearsal determined to explore these other possibilities. However, I found this was extremely difficult. Because I had been working on a level of direct representation with the piece for several months, I had a hard time even imagining other ideas. I hoped the rehearsal process would shed some light on the implications of these other situations that involved caution tape. During my subsequent rehearsals involving the caution tape, I kept waiting for something we were doing to just click into place and suddenly make sense.

For example, I decided to work with Van Dunk and Hayes on developing a partnering and duet phrase. In the middle of the piece, they had been locked in an embrace upstage right of the caution tape. This juxtaposition of the hugging couple, with the line of caution tape running across the stage in front of them was interesting to me. Deciding to start with my own interests, we began with that image. We worked with their archetypal phrases to develop a duet that would emerge out of the embrace. We began by just placing the two phrases next to one another to see what they looked like in relationship. We worked on traveling the phrases together, on changing the levels so that they juxtaposed one another, and on changing the timing and movement qualities. Nothing seemed to work. While I understood that there were other interpretations that could be made with the caution tape, I was unable to see the caution tape as anything except for a metaphor for the fourth wall.

As a result, I continued receiving similar feedback from my committee—the piece still seemed representational and the abstract movement didn't seem to naturally flow out of the walking. Even though I had been working with my dancers on the issues brought forth by my committee, the piece still wasn't working and I had no idea what to do.

This sense of helplessness mixed with frustration made me begin to feel like I was banging my head against a wall. I was making changes, but the core problems still remained. In the next rehearsal, I created a full structure of all the parts we had been working on which I intellectually believed should work. However, that night I couldn't sleep. There was something gnawing in the back of my consciousness that I couldn't quite name. I knew there were problems with the piecing together I had done in rehearsal, but I couldn't wrap my fingers around what it was.

The Structure Takes Over

The feedback I received from my committee after showing this new version of the piece brought the problems I couldn't name into full, unforgiving focus. They said that the piece was still representational, I needed to dig deeper into the ideas, and that I needed to let the piece breathe.

At the time, I had no idea how to respond to the questions and concerns they brought up. But as I continued to think about it, I realized that it was impossible for me to respond because I hadn't been paying attention to what the content of the piece was trying to say. I had been so concerned in making the structure work that I forgot to make sure that the structure was actually serving the piece.

I realized that in the process of making the piece, I had fallen back into my goal- and future-oriented patterns I experienced in my process for my senior project piece because I was afraid I might fail. Bayles and Orland term this kind of fear "disaster fanatasies." They state, "…you may even find yourself caught in the middle, staring at your half-finished canvas and fearing both that you lack the ability to finish it, and no one will understand it if you will" (1993, p. 14). The empty canvas and uncertain outcome of the piece panicked me. So, to give myself a sense of security, I had decided early on how the piece would begin and end. In doing so, I guaranteed that I would not only begin it, but that I would finish it and that the structure would be so strong that everyone would understand it.

Instead of being present in the moment and allowing uncertainty within my process, I intellectualized every decision I made. And as Bayles and Orland state, "Uncertainty is essential, inevitable and all-pervasive companion … to make art. And

tolerance for uncertainty is prerequisite to succeeding" (1993, p. 21). Because of my fears, I had no tolerance for uncertainty, so I constructed a safety net, the structure, to give me a sense of security within the process.

This is not to say that fear within the creative process is always negative. However, the structure of the piece and my fear-oriented focus became a bandage that I put over my fears—pretending they weren't there even as they grew larger and larger. It wasn't the fears that were the problem, per say, but rather my insistence that they didn't exist.

As a result, by rigidly defining the choreography through the structure to help abate my fears of the uncertain future of the piece and its success, the piece became stunted, uni-dimensional, and predictable. The choreography was about making a pre-determined structure work. As a result, I had missed other possibilities of what the piece might have had to say. The piece had become about getting to an ending and completely skipping the actual *process* of creating.

An example of this was the use of caution tape, discussed previously. I became so focused on that particular use of the caution tape as the fourth wall because of how it furthered the structure of the piece. This direct focus on the singular symbolization of the caution tape stifled anything else that the caution tape could have represented.

I realized that even the way I structured my rehearsals had become future-oriented. I deliberately and systematically applied a theory known as the Creative Systems Theory to my creative process. Creative Systems Theory was developed by Charles Johnston and outlined in his book*, The Creative Imperative: Human Growth and Planetary Evolution.* In it, Johnston outlines stages of creative development: pre-axis,

early-axis, middle axis, and late axis. These stages are applicable to all aspects of life, from the development of civilizations to making art to personal and professional relationships (1995, pp. 81-84). Within the development of the piece, I consciously used the stages of the system to aid in developing the choreography and ideas in the piece. An example of an early axis rehearsal tool might be improvisation; an example of a late axis tool might be refining set material. Early axis is the stage in the creative cycle that relates to play. Often this is where ideas begin to infiltrate the mind, but they have yet to take form. Late axis is the stage in the cycle where the idea is fully formed and is being refined to its essence.

I had been planning my rehearsals to include activities and developments that fit different stages of the process. My intention was to use each of the stages in accordance with their usefulness to the piece rather than in a specific order. However, after my startling realization, I sensed that the rehearsals were being determined by the theory rather than by the piece itself. In other words, the piece was serving the theory rather than the other way around.

When I finally came to these realizations, the piece had become a dry shell—the structure from isolation to carnival was *very* clear, but there was no real meaning left inside of it. I realized that in my struggle with the piece, the only thing I had not tried was changing the entire structure of the piece. I had been so attached to the structure, to my safety net, that I was blinded to the possibility of letting it go.

Drastic measures were needed. I knew the structure needed to go and that I needed time to watch the choreography that existed without the pressure of having to

make all the decisions and that I needed some time to observe the piece, breathe, and sense my own deep reactions to the choreography.

Throwing the Structure Away

In order to give myself the time to watch the piece, breathe, and sense, I decided to invite a colleague into one of my rehearsals to work with the piece. I knew that because I had become so stuck on a specific structural outline, it would be difficult for me to see the piece any other way. I decided to bring Shih-Ya Peng, a fellow graduate student, into my reheasal because her choreographic style is so different from my own. While I tend to focus on structure and flow, Peng focuses on the images evoked by the movement and pieces the structure together from there.

I felt nervous about bringing Peng into my rehearsal for several reasons. The first was that I was afraid that Peng would take the dance in a direction I didn't want or like and then I wouldn't have time to put it back together. The second reason was that I was afraid that the piece would no longer be mine. There was the possibility that she would actually make huge improvements to the piece and I wondered if that happened, would it still be my piece? And, would I be able to choreograph a piece in the future without her help?

For the first concern, I comforted myself with the idea that if nothing else, I would be able to see another person's interpretation of my choreography. Even if I didn't like what she did, it would at least be another perspective that would at least help me look past the structure I had created and into the core of the material. I had to truly relinquish control over the piece and allow myself to be open to what someone else might do with the dance.

For the second concern, that Peng might make the piece better, I likened my piece to my experience as an editor. As an editor, I often took other people's work and made suggestions for rewording, rearranging (sentences, paragraphs or even whole sections), and for the development of sections. However, as an editor, even if the author kept those changes, I never considered their writing my own because I made suggestions. I realized that I needed to think of Peng making concrete suggestions about my piece and that her role was as an outside eye to my work, rather than that she was taking over as the choreographer. She would be playing with my choreographic ideas, much as I played with other people's words and sentences as an editor. None of her ideas would be final decisions—I could always disregard, change, or refine them as I saw fit. As for my concern about future pieces, I decided that the only important thing at that moment was the piece I was working on. Hopefully, by bringing Peng into rehearsal, I would learn something that would apply to future projects. So while I was still nervous about the idea of having someone else take over my rehearsal, I felt comforted enough to surrender the work to someone else and practice being present.

For that rehearsal, I gave Peng very simple instructions: rearrange and work with the existing choreography based on what was interesting to her. I would only be there to observe. Because I wasn't responsible for the rehearsal, I let what I was seeing and feeling just wash over me. I turned my focus inward and began sensing my own reactions to the choreography. I watched Peng take the structure I had created and completely throw it out. At the beginning of the rehearsal, I felt resistance to the rearranging of my structure. For example, Peng put a section where the dancers interact with the caution tape at the beginning of the piece. Based on the original structure, this wasn't supposed to

happen until the end. But, instead of allowing that resistance to build, I acknowledged it and then practiced letting that resistance go. So, the benefit of having Peng come to direct one of my rehearsals had less to do with her specific actions and more to do with the fact that I finally was able to experience mindfulness in the rehearsal process for the first time. My focus went from making the structure work to sensing my own instincts and putting what I *thought* should happen on the back burner.

This was a turning point for me in the choreographic process and after the rehearsal I observed, my mode of looking at the piece shifted. Instead of worrying about forcing the structure and the ending to work, I focused on being present and on working with what was there. It was exhilarating and frightening. Bayles and Orland address this by stating, " … fears not only continue to exist, they exist side by side with the desires that complement them" (1993, p. 50). I still felt vulnerable in the uncertainty of the creative process, but I knew that I needed to learn to coexist with it. I started breathing, listening to what already existed within the choreography, and with that breath became more mindful. Within that awareness, I was able to transform my mental state into one that was more open to possibilities and less concerned about a structure based on what I intellectually thought should happen. I learned to rely on the vulnerability of being present in the moment, rather than the comfort of knowing the outcome. I no longer had the safety of the structure I created and the security of knowing the ending, but the piece began to take on a life of its own. I was merely there to shape it and give it substance. Suddenly, I was listening to the dance, rather than telling the dance what it was.

When I abandoned myself to the moment, the piece completely transformed. Instead of being merely about transitioning the audience from one tone and theater space

to another, it began to take on a whole other meaning. Themes of mindfulness and transformation, while yet unformed, began to appear not only in the process of the work, but also within the work itself. I threw out the old structure and completely rearranged the piece and much of the choreography within it. The beginning became the end and the middle the beginning. The caution tape no longer only represented the boundary between the audience and performer, but began to take on multiple meanings and interpretations. It was a boundary separating the performers from one another; it was an integral part of the landscape the dance existed within. There was even room for varied interpretation in its usage in the piece. In addition, I added two new sections and a new sound score, all two days before the faculty showing.

One of the sections I added was at the beginning of the piece and included a monologue about a fire in the sound score. This monologue came from a passage in the book *Glass Castle: A Memoir,* by Jeannette Walls. The original passage was almost a page long, but I shortened it to the following:

> I was on fire. It's my earliest memory. I was three years old … I was standing on a chair in front of the stove, wearing a pink dress my grandmother had bought for me. Pink was my favorite color. The dress's skirt stuck out like a tutu, and I liked to spin in front of the mirror, thinking I looked like a ballerina. But at that moment, I was wearing the dress to cook hot dogs … when I stood up and started stirring the hot dogs again, I felt a blaze of heat on my right side. … my dress was on fire. … Then the flames leaped up, reaching my face. (Walls, 2005, p. 7)

The text felt important to me first because it was a retelling of a memory and I began sensing that ideas of the past were important to the piece. The second reason the text felt important was the vibrant image of the fire the text evoked. Though I wasn't sure how yet, fire seemed an important part of this new piece.

For the faculty showing, I named the piece *Tape: A Cautionary Tale.* I decided on the title because, at that point, the piece had become a series of vignettes loosely tied together by their relationship to the caution tape. At the faculty feedback session after showing *Tape: A Cautionary Tale,* two main points were echoed by many of the faculty members. The first was a question of why I wanted to show *Tape* in "Bang: An Inter-Dimensional Performance" in an alternative space, such as a small room. With all of the vast changes I made to *Tape,* it now seemed like it could work well on a stage in the proscenium theater, rather than in a room. The section with performer-audience interaction no longer existed; the only reason to have *Tape* in the alternative space was that the room would provide a more intimate setting. However, even this reason was countered by concerns that it would be difficult for the audience to experience *Tape* in a room. I agreed with this assessment. While having the piece performed on a proscenium stage veered from my original plan, when the piece took on a life of its own, it seemed to call for being performed on a stage rather than in an alternative setting.

As a result, I decided to push *Tape* to be ready for the graduate concert on stage in a month, rather than in the informal space at the end of the semester performance. The changes I made to *Tape* made me feel that it would be appropriate as a staged piece. I imagined it would be performed on the proscenium stage at the Graduate Thesis Concert in November, and then again with an additional section at "Bang: An Inter-Dimensional Dance Concert" in December. I planned to use the comparison of the performance of the piece in two different spaces as a part of my writings.

The second main concern was that the piece seemed to still lack a strong through-line. This concern took more time to address. One idea that was suggested in the feedback session was the idea of using fire as a uniting theme.

Fire as a Transformation Theme

As mentioned earlier, the image of the fire stuck in my mind and interested me, so when the idea of fire as a theme was mentioned in the feedback session, I decided to follow that thread. While I couldn't quite name it at first, the ideas surrounding my interest in fire were refined as rehearsals continued. One memory that came to me was of when I was a child and my family had a fireplace in the lowest level of our house. After the fires had burned down, we would fill a bucket with the remains of the fire, the ashes. We spread the ashes over the garden so that when spring came our garden was fertilized in part by the remnants left by the fire. This left me with two thoughts: the first was that fire is destructive and the second was that fire is transformative and life-giving.

As I delved further in my thinking on the idea of fire as a transformative force, I came upon the Greek myth, "The Phoenix." In it, fire is both a transformative and a cultivating force:

> When [the Phoenix] felt its death approaching (every 500 or 1461 years), it would build a nest of aromatic wood and set it on fire, and was consumed by the flames. When it was burned, a new phoenix sprang forth from the pyre. (Lindemans, n.d.)

In this passage, it was only once the Phoenix was completely destroyed by the fire that a new Phoenix was able to be born. So while the fire was destructive, it was also transformative and life-giving because it allowed a new Phoenix to spring forth from the ashes. This emergence of fire as a transformative force turned *Tape's* focus from preparatory transitions to transformation. Preparation and transition were still important

within the transformation, but fire as a transformative force became the overarching theme of the piece.

With this in mind, I began working with other aspects of the piece to embed the theme of fire throughout the piece. While I decided not to use the archetype solos for a carnival section as I originally planned, Adler's and Frampton's solos were still embedded as different sections within the piece. I decided to work with each them separately to layer a fiery tone on top of their original solos, using different adjectives and images of fire. Before beginning, I explained to the two of them, that I wasn't sure exactly what I was looking for, but that I wanted to work with them to see what we could discover together. I hoped that by taking this approach, I could be open about not knowing the exact answers, but rather working and refining my ideas by collaborating with each of them. For example, I asked Frampton to layer ideas of sizzling and crackling on top of her already existing phrase. Over several rehearsals, we worked to refine her new layering. When there was something that didn't seem to be working kinesthetically or intellectually, we would talk and work together to find something that we both felt comfortable with. I worked much the same way with Adler. The process was hugely successful for working on this section of the piece. By working together with Adler and Frampton and focusing on being present, we were able to come together to make something truly interesting both for myself and for the dancers, which supported the overarching theme of the piece. For the dancers, the movement and the concepts became embodied and visceral, rather than merely intellectual. In this way, I continued embedding ideas of fire within different aspects of the piece. I found that by focusing on

the present moment, I was able to encourage the transformation of the piece from the focus on the structure to the focus on the content.

After this rehearsal, in a feedback session with my committee, we discussed how to clarify the through-line even further. While many of the elements and images within the piece were stronger, the intention of the piece was not clear. The question, "What is the piece saying?" came up. I realized that I needed to amplify my own ideas of what the piece meant and make sure they were consistent throughout. For example in my own interpretation, the piece had begun to revolve around one of the dancers, London. For me, the other dancers represented her memories and emotions. I wanted to make this apparent from the beginning of *Tape.* I decided to change the beginning to reflect this. Originally, the piece began with Van Dunk and Hayes performing their duet. As they finished their duet and exited, London entered. I felt that if Hayes and Van Dunk truly represented London's memories, London should be onstage observing them in their duet. So I changed the beginning of the piece to include London and in doing so, set-up London's relationship to Hayes and Van Dunk from the very beginning.

While I began to think in terms of what each dancer represented, the representation came out of the movement and choreography rather than out of a structure based on what I intellectually thought should happen. This layering served to pull the piece together into something that was not only cohesive, but also meaningful for myself and for the dancers. I realized that by being present with the content of the piece, I was able to allow the piece to continue to refine the transformation that it had begun.

Another example of this happened one week before the graduate concert. In a conversation with my committee, I realized that the title I had chosen for the piece, *Tape:*

A Cautionary Tale, no longer fit with the content of the piece. While the caution tape was still an integral part of the piece, it was no longer the focus. The focus of the piece had become the fire. For me, the caution tape had become a barrier holding an internal struggle or metaphoric fire from escaping, though it eventually does. My committee and I brainstormed together on the idea of fire and barriers. Finally we came upon the title *Firewall.* In forest fires, fire fighters often build a wall of fire, a firewall, to stop a fire from burning out of control. In the piece, this was what the caution tape represented; it was a metaphoric firewall. The entire piece had become about an attempt to keep a metaphoric fire from burning out of control. As the tension of the movement and the tension between the dancers builds it is constantly held back, or even stopped, by both London and the caution tape, which serves as a firewall. *Firewall* seemed a more appropriate title for the piece.

In order to bring these solidified ideas into full fruition, throughout the week before the concert I worked with my dancers in short sessions to really expand and deepen the ideas that we had been exploring. For example, I worked with Frampton to develop her embodiment of the fiery-ness of her part. Her section had become repetitive to the point where it stagnated. In our brief rehearsal, we delved deeper into the ideas of fire as a transformative force, rather than as a purely malevolent force. We realized it had been difficult for her to really embody the fiery aspect of her part because she felt like a negative force. Once we refocused her energy into transformation rather than malevolence she was able to more deeply embody the movement. We also worked to develop more movement within the structured improvisation she had been practicing by adding a reinterpretation of the duet movement through the lens of her fiery character. I

also asked her to start smaller with her movements and then enlarge them exponentially as time progressed. With the addition of these parts, she was able to allow the development of the movements to build for longer, keeping her part from becoming overly repetitive.

Conclusions

With these refinements, *Firewall* had its own life and became something I could never have planned beforehand. Through the process of creating and refining *Firewall,* I became aware of the importance of being present in the moment with the choreography and to truly sense and listen to what was coming out of the process rather than imposing a structure on a piece before it has had a chance to speak.

I realized that at the beginning of the process I had fallen into my practice of being future-oriented because of my fear of failure and of uncertainty inherent in the process. Through the making of *Firewall*, I learned that by recognizing and acknowledging those fears for what they were, I was able to be more mindful. This is not to say that the fears did not still exist, but rather that by coming into relationship with them I could avoid fixating on them and allowing them to take control of my creative process.

I learned that when I allow a piece to speak to me, rather than dictating what I think it should be, I can learn more about my own intentions. When I finally watched the performance of *Firewall,* I realized that my thesis was not in fact about transitions and preparation, but rather how mindfulness can lead to transformation.

An example of this is the ending, which for me is the strongest metaphor of finding transformation through mindfulness. Throughout the piece, it is as if London has

struggled with her past memories and with her fears of the future based on those past memories. The caution tape represents the barrier between the past and the future and aids her in keeping her fears at bay. When the three dancers rush the tape and break through it, it is as if the barrier between the past and the future is broken. In that moment, it seems that London is finally able to surrender to the present moment and allow the past and the future to drop away. In that moment, it is as if she no longer needs the caution tape and the memories trapped behind it. For me, when she finally allows the fires of the past to burn themselves out, she is able to enter a new and more fertile ground.

Within my process, the structure of the piece became my firewall. I was so fearful of what might happen in the future, that I made myself a barrier that kept me from truly experiencing the possibilities of the present moment. When I allowed the structure to drop away, as London allows herself to move beyond the caution tape, I was finally able to be mindful of the moment and allow change and transformation to occur as needed.

The creation of *Firewall* not only rerouted my ideas about my thesis, it also gave me experience in the practice of mindfulness that was paramount to the creation of my final piece for the semester, *Chrysalis.* As Bayles and Orland state, " What you need to know for your next piece is contained in the last piece" (1993, p. 35). In making *Firewall,* I realized several things that I brought into the process of *Chrysalis*. The first was that I needed to make the space for myself to be present and mindful within the rehearsal process. If I became caught up in the end product, I would run the risk of determining what the piece would be without allowing the piece to speak for itself.

I also learned that within that mindfulness, I needed to follow my own intuition and impulses—not to question them immediately. At the beginning of the process for

Firewall, I would not allow any thoughts or ideas that did not fit into the structure I originally created, which stifled the piece. I realized that only when I was able to be present and mindful could true transformation take place. When I was so focused on the future of the piece, I was manufacturing transformation rather than actually living it. So, when I began the process for *Chrysalis,* I was determined to allow myself the time and space to be present and mindful.

CHAPTER 3

CHRYSALIS

The Making of Chrysalis

After *Firewall* was performed in the Graduate Thesis Concert, I decided that I would not show it again in December at the end of the semester in "Bang: An Inter-Dimensional Performance Experience," as I had originally planned. I felt that *Firewall* was complete as it was and that adding another section would not make sense within the structure of the piece and would in fact weaken it.

Instead, I decided to make a new piece, *Chrysalis,* using what I discovered in the process of making *Firewall*. My goal for *Chrysalis* was that it would represent and embody transformation and mindfulness. Using the same dancers from *Firewall,* I planned to reset a group section originally choreographed for *Firewall.* Due to scheduling issues, I would only be able to have one group rehearsal, and after talking with my committee, I came to the realization that one rehearsal would most likely not be enough time to make a piece that delved deeply enough into the ideas I was researching. I wasn't sure what else to do.

Then, during a technique class two weeks before the performance opened, I had a revelation. Just because my dancers didn't have time to rehearse didn't mean that I couldn't rehearse. So, I decided to choreograph a solo for myself and rehearse every day over the following two weeks. I felt that performing the piece myself would give me the opportunity to embody the ideas regarding transformation and mindfulness that were ignited by *Firewall.* I imagined that this solo would take place inside of the walking section originally created for *Firewall.*

Solo Rehearsals

Creating the Space

In the making of *Firewall* I learned the importance of creating a space and time for the rehearsal process, so that was my first step when I began *Chrysalis.* I knew that I needed to allow time for the piece to begin to take shape and that I would shortchange it if I became too focused on the end product. Since I only had about two weeks to create this piece, and the rehearsal with the other dancers was scheduled only a few days before opening night, I wanted to have the solo section well set by the date of the group rehearsal. So, I knew that creating a space for myself to work on the solo and set times to do it would be paramount to the process.

The founder of Ashtanga Yoga, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois expressed a similar sentiment in his teachings. He is well known for saying, " … practice and all is coming" (Ganon & Life, n.d.) The idea is to just be present in the time and space of the moment and trust that growth and transformation will come. I began the rehearsal process with Jois's words as my mantra. I reserved a space and time and then challenged myself to stay and just practice my art. In order to get myself out of my very specific, directed, and end-oriented

habits in the rehearsal process, I used a small space and dimmed the lights, which made the space feel comfortable and helped to contain my thoughts and stay focused and mindful of the present moment.

Authentic Movement

With the time and space set, I decided to begin almost every solo rehearsal with an improvisation, which resembled a moving meditation. During these improvisations, I practiced being present with myself in the moment. When my mind wandered to the past or the future, I lightly drew it back to the present moment. This kind of improvisation has its roots in authentic movement:

> Authentic Movement, as described by Mary Whitehouse, is moving that is natural to a particular person, not learned like ballet or calisthenics, not purposeful or intellectualized as 'this is the way I should move' to be pleasing, to be powerful, to be beautiful or graceful. Authentic Movement is an immediate expression of how a [practitioner] feels at any given moment. (Adler, 2000a, p. 122)

One of the purposes of authentic movement is to aid the practitioner in being able to observe his or her body while at the same time experiencing it. By moving from a subconscious level and practicing constant mindfulness, the practitioner will shed light on his or her body's intellect.

In an authentic movement session, there are movers and witnesses; each mover is partnered with a witness. When done in a group setting, the witnesses and movers form a circle around the edge of the space. This is referred to as "holding the space." The mover moves into the circle with his or her eyes closed when a bell chimes. He or she begins to move in whatever way feels right in that moment. If the mover does not feel the impulse to move, he or she may choose to stay still. The idea is to move when the impulse strikes,

not questioning the movement impulse, but rather riding it. The moment is the only thing that matters—not what came before or what might come after.

The witness, who is still holding the space, simply observes, consciously, without judgment. (In authentic movement, non-judgment is something to practice and refine.) Often the moderator of an authentic movement session will give the witnesses a mantra or several mantras to choose from while observing their partner's movement. The purpose of the mantras is to help the witness claim their own judgments and interpretations of what the mover is doing instead of projecting them onto the mover. Some examples are as follows:

1. I love you as you are and I feel…
2. (Mover's Name) is doing exactly what she needs to be doing right now and I feel …
3. (Mover's Name) is (describe movement) and I feel …
4. I have no idea what (Mover's Name) is doing and I feel …
5. My story of what is happening is … (Hackney, personal communication, June 20, 2009)

At the end of the movement session, the witness is to offer their gaze to the mover to signify to the mover that the mover was witnessed. The mover can choose to meet the witness's gaze, or not—as they feel appropriate. At this point both the mover and the witness take time to write about their experience in present tense. This present tense writing helps to keep the experience in the present, not in the past or future. Next the mover shares with the witness his or her experience. This could be anything from the mover's emotional journey to images the movement brought up. The witness then shares

his or her experience. Finally, the mover/witness roles are reversed at which point the whole process repeats.

In her paper, "Who is the Witness," Janet Adler writes that authentic movement may also take place with only one participant. That participant is acting as his or her own witness while also moving. This singular participant would be both observing him or herself as a witness and at the same time remaining in touch with how he or she is moving (2000b, p. 150-154).

This was the kind of improvisation I developed in each of my rehearsals. I practiced acting as my own mover and witness. I would stay present in the moment, while at the same time cultivating an internal witness for myself. To do so, I practiced paying attention on a proprioceptive and kinesthetic level to the movement I was doing without judgment, while at the same time following cues my body was giving me as a mover. Over time, I found my own practice of mindfulness and presence growing in depth.

Cellular Entities

In addition to the ideas fostered from authentic movement practice, I worked with the writings and explorations of choreographer Deborah Hay in her book *My Body, the Buddhist.* In it, Hay reflects on her own processes within creative work. In one particular section, she writes about a practice she refers to as *my body engages in work.* This was a practice she both lead and practiced as she taught a workshop at Skidmore College. With the students of the workshop Hay asked, "What if every cell in my body engages in work?" (2000, p. 17)

I linked this question into my improvisation to aid me in finding a fuller bodily awareness. As I moved, I would imagine that my whole body was engaged in whatever task was at hand. If I was lying on the floor, I engaged and observed my whole body lying on the floor. If I was walking, jumping, or moving slowly, I engaged and observed all of my cells in each of those actions. While, obviously, I was unable to literally see or feel every cell engaging in the work, this thought aided me in honing in on my physicality and experiencing the present moment to the smallest unit.

Slowly as the improvisation continued, I would allow my eyes to open, practicing taking in the space, while still engaging and observing my own body. I rehearsed surveying and accepting the space and what it contained without losing the deep awareness I gained while my eyes were closed. I worked to find the balance between engaging and observing my own body while still engaging and observing the space. This practice provided the foundation for the making of *Chrysalis*.

I practiced this improvisation at every rehearsal, both for the mindfulness it brought and to aid me in deciding the next step for the piece. As a result, I was allowing the dance to lead me rather than imposing my own ideas of what I thought should happen on top of it. For example, during one rehearsal, as I was practicing my improvisation, a gestural phrase from a piece I worked on the previous summer came into my consciousness. Without judging that thought, I began moving through the phrase—remembering it and then modifying it to fit the themes of mindfulness, transition, and transformation. This modified phrase became the backbone of *Chrysalis.*

This phrase was originally made as a part of a piece exploring transitions. When I was choreographing the original phrase, I was dealing with my own inner turmoil and

practicing being present with that turmoil—not trying to fix it or cover it up, merely allowing myself to just live into it even as uncomfortable as it was.

This phrase came back into my mind as a reminder of another time when I had been practicing the act of being present, even in discomfort. While the situation for *Chrysalis* was not the same, the same sense of mindfulness was embedded inside of it and so it seemed an apt phrase to develop. In short, I was using what I learned from the practice of improvisation to form the gestural phrase.

Repetition and Mindfulness

As I continued to work on this phrase, I felt that setting simple choreography that could be repeated for the piece would aid me in delving deeper into the theme of transformation. I felt that by practicing repetition of a set, I could sense the deeper levels of change within my body. As I noticed those changes, I could then modify the movement to line up with what I sensed.

In Ashtanga yoga, the principle of mindful repetition is the foundation of the practice. Ashtanga yoga consists of several practice series, each building on the last. A practitioner of Ashtanga yoga first practices the primary series (a series of about 50 asanas or poses) over and over until they have a strong understanding of all of the asanas. For some practitioners this can be years of practicing six out of seven days of every week, adding up to many, many repetitions of the same asanas in the same order.

The purpose of this repetition is to allow the practitioner to notice where the body and mind are from day to day and to slowly transform the body and mind through that repetition. Because the Ashtanga practitioner is not as concerned with what the next pose is, their mind is free to be truly present physically, mentally, and emotionally. According

to Ashtanga principles being present in the repetition of the movement and noticing subtle changes in the body and mind is key to allowing transformation to take place.

I adapted this idea of repetition as a means for growth and transformation within my own choreographic process, specifically in the repetitions of the gestural phrase. When I was able to stay mindfully in the moment, I could feel when a movement was too fast or when the development of the next section took too long. I could feel when I needed to push a section further or when I needed to hold back. By witnessing and sensing my movements and emotional states, I found I was able to take a very accurate reading of what, if anything, needed to change.

Using these methodologies, I created a loose format for the repetition of the gestural phrase. It began slow and calm, and gradually built to a faster pace with more accents. Then, I made a bigger movement phrase that used movement motifs from the gestural phrase, but covered more space and used bigger more full-bodied movements.

Cellular Entities in Performance

As I continued to practice my engaging/observing improvisation as a warm-up, I began to wonder how I could practice this kind of awareness and involvement without getting lost in the space with an audience present. Observing and engaging in an empty space was becoming familiar, but what would happen with the introduction of an audience? The performance was to take place in a small space so I knew that I would be able to see every audience member and their reactions.

During one rehearsal as I was reading Hay's book, I had an epiphany. Hay writes "… it is useful to read each other as cellular entities engaging in work…" (2000, p. 17-18). In this section, she encourages the students in her workshop at Skidmore College to

regard other bodies as a part of a whole in completing a task. I began thinking of the performance setting as the whole, with the parts being the performers, audience members and stage setting. What if we were all part of a singular body? Everyone in the performance experience had a part to play. What if I approached the performance event as an authentic movement event? What if the audience and I were both movers and witnesses?

The authentic movement mantra, "(Mover's Name) is doing exactly what she needs to be doing right now…" was of special interest to me. I wondered what might happen if I regarded the audience members with that mantra and imagined that was how I was being regarded—with a sense of acceptance.

In my next solo rehearsal, I asked a colleague familiar with authentic movement to practice with me. I changed the format of the authentic movement session slightly so that each of us as movers would have our eyes open as we moved. As the mover moved, she would also be taking in the surroundings and the witness—in effect the mover would be witnessing the witness. In addition, we were to treat our focus as a part of our movement—responding in the same way other parts of our body would. The witness's role was to stay the same—to sit on the perimeter of the space and watch.

In this exercise, I had two questions:

1. How would having a witness to the improvisation I had been practicing alone change the experience?
2. How could (or would) I be able to remain mindful of myself while being observed and observing?

I found that when I allowed my gaze to be a part of the movement, I was able to see my colleague, even meet her gaze without feeling awkward. But, if I took myself out of the very present moment, how I was moving and feeling in that moment, and looked at myself from the outside, I immediately felt awkward. Suddenly, I was "performing the act of being present," rather than just doing the work. Having an actual witness to the improvisation brought this very clearly to the forefront of my mind. With someone else watching, I found I was much more likely to pull out of the present moment and look at myself from the outside.

As my rehearsals continued, I kept these ideas in mind. I practiced staying present while pretending there were audience members in the space with me. I even practiced feeling uncomfortable—but really feeling it, not trying to cover it over. To do this, I brought in practice audience members to watch. At times, I would slip into performer mode and in those instances, when I met the audience member's gaze, I felt uncomfortable, as if I made a mistake. In those moments, instead of trying to mask my feelings of discomfort, I would allow myself to acknowledge them and then to let them go. As I did, I continued to refine the development of the gestural phrase and the larger phrase, layering the audience observation on top of the rehearsed movement.

As I worked on the larger movement phrase for the final section, I realized that I was finding it difficult to get the sense of urgency I wanted with such specifically choreographed movement. So, I began practicing the set phrase as a structured improvisation. I tried several different structures, but the structure I settled on was the idea of trying to do the set phrase while the floor underneath me kept falling away and changing.

The structured improvisation began with movement very similar to the beginning gestural phrase, but as I imagined the floor beneath me falling away at greater and greater frequencies, the elements of the original phrase morphed and changed, eventually reaching a new normal. This structured improvisation of trying to hold onto something while the environment around it changes seemed apt to the development of piece. For me, the environment changing around me represented my own values morphing while I, as the soloist, represented my deep sense of self trying to find itself again in this new landscape. In short, I, as the soloist, was transforming.

Breath Patterning

A theme that re-emerged along with mindfulness and transformation was breath patterning. Again remembering my own experiences with breath as a means to find mindfulness, I worked with breath patterning in my rehearsals. Peggy Hackney writes on this topic in her book, *Making Connections: Total Body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals,* "we can consciously choose to alter our breathing to affect our feelings, thoughts, and patterns of moving" (2002, p. 52). I found that by beginning the piece with slow, deep yogic breathing I was able to find a very meditative, present state. And so, I continued to work with breath patterning as the piece developed.

During rehearsals, I played with both listening to my breathing without changing it and changing my breath patterning to heighten or lessen the intensity of the movement. When I tuned into my breathing, I noticed that my breathing became more labored and less even as I moved and that I used my breath, specifically the exhale, to help me accomplish a movement when my body started tiring. For example, I might exhale sharply to jump or to close into a ball.

One explanation for this favoring of exhalation to the inhalation is found in yogic philosophy. In yogic texts, breath is considered cleansing. The inhale is considered the soap and the exhale the rinsing off of the unnecessary. In his book *The Tree of Yoga,* B.K.S. Iyengar, the founder of Iyengar yoga writes, "Exhalation … is the removal of toxins from the system. …it quiets the mind. Exhalation is the surrender of our ego" (1988, p.131). In *Chrysalis,* the exhale became the force by which transformation was possible—ridding body and mind of the old ideas and patterns and making room for the new.

In addition to simply tuning in to how movement affected my breath and vice versa, I also played with manufacturing breath, especially at the most fervent moments of the piece. As the build within the piece progressed, I would purposefully make my breathing pattern irregular. Then, I would tune into how my body felt and what emotions came up. I found that as my breathing pattern changed, the more labored (even manufactured) my movements felt. My body actually responded by creating muscle tension and I felt a stronger impulse to continue moving—almost as if I was fighting an invisible and unknown assailant. However, the movement eventually felt manufactured and uncomfortable.

Instead of choosing between the two, I found that a balance between them was the most beneficial for expressing the struggle of transformation. By allowing a fluid interplay between allowing my movement to affect my breath and my breath to affect my movement, I could achieve the tone of struggle I wanted in that section of the piece. When I noticed how my breath responded to a change in movement and then allowed a change of breath in response, I could reinforce the movement and vice-versa. By

allowing an organic flow between the two, I was able to find a balance that felt natural and allowed the transformation within the piece to take place.

Group Rehearsals

At this point in the process, I began the group rehearsals. As mentioned earlier, due to the short amount of time, I only had one rehearsal and a short dress rehearsal with the dancers, so this part of the process came after I had already done much of the research for the piece on my own.

The majority of the choreography for the group section was comprised of walking. The walk began slow, meditative, and measured. Each dancer entered the space one at a time and began walking down their own linear track, from one side of the space to the other. Slowly, pauses were added and the pace of the walk began to accelerate, eventually becoming a run. My solo and the pacing of the group section played off of one another—sometimes I led the acceleration and sometimes they did.

This walking section was deceptively difficult to choreograph and took almost a year to refine. The process for this section began with the piece *Transitions I* (see p. 11), continued as a part of *Firewall,* and then became an integral part of *Chrysalis.* While the pattern of walking did not change drastically, the way in which the walking was performed did.

In *Transitions I,* the dancers were instructed to train their eyes forward on their pathway—to not notice or acknowledge the other dancers. This is not to say that they were instructed to "zone out," but rather to have their own agenda and to not allow the dancers close by to distract them. The purpose of this was to enhance the sense of isolation by walking seemingly alone while surrounded by other people. For *Transitions*

I, I chose this isolating mood as a way to prepare the audience for the isolating tone of the performance that came after it. Knowing that I wanted to create a meditative feel for *Chrysalis* and not an isolating one, I changed the way of performing the walk to support meditation rather than isolation.

In *Chrysalis,* the dancers still walked on their own track, but they used what is termed a *soft focus*. Rather than focusing distinctly on one specific place or object, with soft focus, the objective was to allow surroundings to filter in through the periphery. However, as something caught their attention, their gaze could follow that interest, but eventually come back to taking everything in around their pathway. This is much like the idea in meditation of noticing thoughts as they come into consciousness and then allowing them to drop away, emptying and re-emptying the mind.

By asking the dancers to practice this kind of walking meditation, I hoped to reinforce the meditative atmosphere, fostering a deep awareness out of which change would be possible. In order to do this, I also created a specific physical environment where the piece would take place.

Performance Environment

In order to create a meditative atmosphere, I relied in part on Rikard Kuller's work, "Pyscho-Physiological Conditions in Theatre Construction." Kuller discusses the connection between the environment in which a performance takes place and the arousal level of the audience members. Arousal refers to an individual's level of activation or how "awake" they are. Kuller named not only the performance itself (and the costuming, sound, decoration) as causes of arousal, but the performance environment (lighting, set design, theater design, seating) as well.

According to Kuller, there are two basic types of arousal: phasic and tonic. "Phasic arousal is the immediate response to stimulation. … Tonic arousal is the general activation level of the individual" (Kuller, 1973, p. 159). The tonic arousal level is somewhat dependent on the phasic arousal. It can be raised or lowered based on the occurrence of change in the phasic arousal level.

Kuller discusses how the level of arousal of an individual is proportional to the level of incoming stimulation. For example, a darkened room with soothing music (low stimulation) would produce a much lower arousal level in an individual than a bright room with colorful music. So, the more stimulation one receives, the more aroused they feel and vice-versa. Moreover, the more prolonged the exposure to stimulation, the more the tonic arousal level will increase. In conjunction with performances, Kuller states, " … even minor displacements in the tonic arousal level like those which will occur during a theatre performance, can bring about drastic changes of the emotional state and in the preparedness to react to the surroundings" (1973, p. 159).

Kuller uses what he terms the eight perceptual dimensions to describe how arousal level can be affected. The eight perceptual dimensions as described by Kuller are enclosedness, complexity, unity, affection, originality, potency, social status, and pleasantness. Though each of the eight perceptional dimensions are important, I chose to focus on unity, complexity, and originality in the creation of the performance environment of *Chrysalis*.

For the performance of *Chrysalis,* I knew that I wanted to construct a meditative atmosphere for both the performers and the audience. Because of all of my discoveries in the creative process of establishing the space to enhance mindfulness and my work with

authentic movement and breath patterning, I felt that creating a meditative environment for the audience would enliven and deepen their experience, as well as my own as a performer. Knowing that I wanted to achieve a meditative tone for the performers, the challenge was to build an environment in which the participants (both the audience and the performer) could relax, but not be so low on stimulation that they might be lulled to sleep.

The space in which the performance was to take place already had a high degree of what Kuller terms unity. *Unity* refers to the perception of how well a room and all of its components fit together. Kuller uses the Gestalt principles to talk about the unity of a room. The Gestalt principles are: "grouping by similarity, grouping by proximity, and grouping by good form" (Kretch as cited in Kuller, 1973, p. 172). "Degree of unity was found to decrease when many different colors appeared in one room … a simple and straightforward example of the principle of similarity" (Kuller, 1973, p. 172). Similar results were found when the other Gestalt principles were violated. Therefore the Gestalt principles seem to be good measures for how unified a room will be perceived to be (Kuller, 1973, p. 172).

The room had a high degree of unity because it was very stark—the walls a dark color and the floor was cement overlaid with a dark wood. To counteract the overwhelming unity of the space and the possibility of a low arousal level, I placed a variety of pillows and cushions lengthwise on each side of the space. The cushions varied greatly in color, size and style. Colors ranged from brown to purple to orange. The style and size varied from a bed pillow to couch cushions to throw pillows. I placed a single row of chairs behind the row of pillows on each side of the room. The chairs also varied

in style, from metal folding chairs to brown patio chairs to wooden stools. I hoped that this wide variety of seating arrangements would raise what Kuller terms the level of complexity, which would counteract the unity of the space.

Kuller states that complexity implies a high amount of variation in the surroundings. The more components a given object or room has, the higher its perceived complexity. Color, lighting, and sound were also shown to increase the perceived complexity (Kuller, 1973, pp. 170-171).

The minimal lighting also reinforced the degree of unity in the space. On each end of the room (lengthwise) there were two spotlights focused in between the rows of pillows, the stage area. No color gels were used in the spotlights so the light was a stark white color. I hoped that this lack of color in the lights would enhance the unity of the space. To slightly counteract the unity of the white lighting so that the space would not lull the audience to sleep, desk lamps were interspersed behind and beside the audience seating. Since the audience is not generally lit during a performance, I hoped that this small amount of lighting would raise the level of what Kuller terms as originality.

Kuller states that originality refers to something unusual or surprising in or about the room. Initially originality causes high arousal, but it is not lasting, in the same way that the arousal from complexity is (Kuller, 1973, p. 175). I hoped that this temporary rise in arousal level might aid in grabbing the audience's interest without long-term interference with the meditative atmosphere.

The costuming also reflected and reinforced the meditative quality of the performance. The five other dancers wore black pants, shirts, and shoes—a high degree of unity, while I wore a bright yellow dress—introducing a degree of complexity. All of

these elements (set design and costuming) together produced a calming and meditative, yet intriguing atmosphere for the piece to exist.

By using the concepts of unity, complexity, and originality from Kuller's eight perceptual dimensions, I was able to create a meditative environment for *Chrysalis* to exist in. In doing so, I was also able to produce a space for myself, as a performer, to be present and mindful.

The Performance: From the Waiting Room and Back

In addition to representing transitions and transformation within the choreography of the piece, I wanted the audience to experience a physical transition. So, *Chrysalis* began in a waiting room, moved into the performance space, and then back into the waiting room.

When audience members arrived at the building, they entered into a room with a television, couches, chairs and refreshments. I designed the space and choreographed the dancers within it specifically knowing that when entering a space, an individual will generally survey the environment, looking for social cues about how to behave. This is especially true of individuals entering a space entirely new to them, as the audience for this show would be.

Roger Barker's theory on behavior settings describes this phenomenon in part. A behavior setting consists of two types of components: the nonhuman and human. The nonhuman components of the theater, like the seating arrangements, encourage the human participants (performers and audience) within the components to interact accordingly. The human components of a behavior setting have a similar effect. Barker

calls those prescribed interactions a *program.* A program consists of a pattern of behavior that is considered acceptable within a specific behavior setting (Wicker, 1979, p. 10).

In the case of the waiting room, the combination of the nonhuman components (the comfortable chairs and the presence of refreshments) and the human components (the dancers) created the desired environment for the waiting room. The chairs were arranged in a circular configuration, encouraging interaction between those seated. The mere presence of refreshments gave audience members the opportunity to interact, while getting cookies and hot cider.

All of the dancers (the human components), except myself, were present in the waiting room and they encouraged people to mingle, partake in the refreshments, and to relax. They did this in two ways. First, the dancers promoted the "acceptable" usage of the space through verbal cues, literally talking to the audience members, asking them if they wanted to sit or try some cider or even merely engaging them in light conversation. The second was by example. By talking, drinking, eating and relaxing, the dancers set the standard establishing what was expected or acceptable to do in this "waiting room."

In addition to setting the "program" for the space, these two modes of interaction with the audience served two purposes. These set the mood, preparing the audience for interaction with performers, and gave the dancers a subtle authority, establishing them as leaders. The role of the dancers as leaders was important for the transitional period of the piece. *Chrysalis* began as I walked through the midst of the lively crowd. Some of the audience members noticed my passing, but many did not. As I continued my passing into the space where the performance would take place, the dancers began turning out the desk lamps in the waiting room and began encouraging hesitant audience members to

follow me into the new space. In effect, they used nonverbal and verbal cues to direct the audience. Turning out the lights and television and moving into the space served as the nonverbal cues. Talking with the audience, using phrases like, “I think it’s time,” and “We should go in this other room now” encouraged the audience members to follow suit.

Description of the Performance of Chrysalis

The progression of the piece, from a slow, meditative pace to a more rigorous and fervent pace allows a gradual increase in stimulation. Within my solo, as varied movements are added to the cumulative repetition of the phrase and the speed and tempo of the movement increases, the complexity of the choreography increases, causing the stimulation levels to increase.

The group movement mirrors this increase in stimulation. The speed of their pattern increases gradually, slowly at first, but eventually faster and faster until a high-frequency pitch is reached. At the same time, my solo, which began on one specific spot, begins to move outside of the self-imposed two-foot by two-foot area and the possibility of colliding into one of the group dancers increases. The unpredictability and anticipation of the possibility of a collision also increases the level of complexity and stimulation within the performance.

Then when I fall, the dancers come to an immediate and sudden stop, and all that is heard and seen within the still figures is heavy breathing, both my own and the dancers. At that moment, the stimulation of the performance falls as a result of the lowered complexity, specifically the stillness of movement.

As the dancers and I slowly begin moving again, the piece comes out of the brief respite of the stillness and silence. The movement stays calm and slow and gradually the group dancers exit the space—using the same slow walk they entered the space with, while I turn and join the audience, observing the dancers—as if I, as the performer, am not so different from those who witnessed.

While this introduction of a new element (a performer joining the audience) causes a slight increase in complexity, the emptying of the space, as well as the desk lamps slowly being turned off, signals a lowering in the overall stimulation created by the piece and by the space. The practice of following the dancers into the performance space when the lights were turned out at the beginning of the piece gives the audience the necessary information to transition themselves, now without virtually any help, back out into the "waiting room" to await their next experience.

In this way, the audience also experiences a physical transition, moving from the waiting room area into the performance area to experience the majority of *Chrysalis,* and then moving back out of the space once it ends. While the audience may not fully realize the metaphor of transformation in the choreography, they are able to experience a spatial and physical transformation that brings with it new information and experiences.

Analysis of Chrysalis in Performance

The Creative Cycle

For me *Chrysalis* is a metaphor for the entire process of transformation I experienced over the course of my creative research, beginning with *Firewall* and continuing through *Chrysalis.* At the beginning of *Chrysalis,* I walk slowly through the waiting room/lobby area, in a yellow dress, barefoot. There is the sense that *something* is

about to happen, but it has yet to be defined. This continues as the piece progresses into the main performance space and as other dancers begin to join the slow pacing of the piece.

In this part of the piece, I feel a sense of anticipation—like a tickle in the back of my throat. I have a feeling that something is about to happen, but it is not yet clear to me what this is. It reminds me of the anticipation I felt at the beginning of the creative process for my thesis. I didn't know what would happen, but I was excited to begin making new discoveries.

In his work on the creative cycle, this part of *Chrysalis* and my creative process exemplifies what Johnston terms pre-axis. Pre-axis is the preconscious stage of the creative cycle. An impulse to form lies under the surface, but it has yet to be designed. (Johnston, 1986, p. 84). The piece is about to begin, and I am about to delve into my creative process. Both situations are about the anticipation for what has not yet formed to begin to surface.

Chrysalis continues as I walk backward, then around myself, and begin a glacially slow stationary gesture, arms eventually forming a cross at the wrist and dividing my face. This is the part of *Chrysalis* where new movement vocabulary is explored and discovered—where new emotional responses to the vocabulary begin to surface. In this stage, I feel curious and interested in these movements, in what they are and how they relate to my own sense of self. As I perform this piece, I am reminded of the beginning rehearsals for *Firewall* where I still felt open to possibilities, where I allowed myself time to brainstorm, before the structure became paramount. Johnston describes this part of the

creative cycle as the early-axis stage. Early-axis is the part of the cycle where the formation of a new idea or way of being begins (Johnston, 1986, pp. 85-86).

In *Chrysalis,* as the repetition and development of the movement phrase continues, the struggle begins. At this point, the dance reaches a crescendo—my solo movement releases from the confines of the previous limitations of the movement vocabulary that has been set-up. At the same time, the other dancers are running, searching, confusing the previously stable environment even more. I struggle to stay upright, struggle to continue. For me, this is the struggle between my sense of self and my new values and ideas. I am working to understand the new ideas within the context of my already well-defined sense of self. I am asking myself how these new concepts and ideas fit into what I already believe to be true. I am questioning all of my preconceived ideas, upsetting the stability and balance I had found before these new values began to seep through. It is the struggle to keep a sense of self within change, to acknowledge change.

In my creative research, this was the part of the process of *Firewall* where I was struggling to make the structure work. It was the part where I finally came to the realization that the structure was limiting the piece. This was where I worked to change my approach to the piece by bringing Peng into my rehearsals and to redefine *Firewall* based on the content of the piece. This was the part of my creative process where I struggled to rid myself of the safety of the structure and of knowing the ending. And finally this was the part where I began to learn how to allow myself to fall into the vulnerability and uncertainty of the present moment.

For me, this is exactly what Johnston describes as the middle axis stage of the creative cycle. The middle axis is the stage with the most struggle—the struggle against limitations, but also to create limits so that the new idea or concept does not slip back into unconscious formlessness (Johnston, 1986, pp. 87-88).

In *Chrysalis,* I fall to the floor for the last time and the other dancers abruptly stop running. All that can be heard is heavy breathing, both my own and the other dancers. The struggle is over, but the remnants remain in the form of our breathlessness. In this part, I am remembering the struggle, accepting it. I begin to move—a gesture that is reminiscent of what came before, but not the same. I repeat this new movement, refining it, establishing it. I am no longer struggling to understand what these new movements represent for my sense of self. I am establishing this newness, refining it. This is the polishing, the establishment of the form that comes with the late-axis stage of the cycle (Johnston, 1986, pp. 89-90).

This stage of the piece and of the creative cycle is reminiscent for me of my beginning process of *Chrysalis.* In the making of *Chrysalis,* I refine and discover the possibilities of this new awareness of mindfulness. I am no longer struggling with how to understand and integrate being present in the moment in conjunction with my creative process. Rather I am playing with and refining how mindfulness can serve me within the transformation that occurs during the creative process.

Finally, in *Chrysalis,* as I join the audience, I feel I have fully integrated the new movement vocabulary into my sense of self and been transformed as a result. My joining the audience acts as a metaphor for that embodiment, acknowledgment, and acceptance of the movement vocabulary and what it represents.

In my creative process, this is the part of the cycle that I look forward to. It is the part of the cycle where the mindfulness I practiced becomes a part of my own vocabulary. Johnston describes this integration stage as where the new form, concept, or idea becomes one with the whole, creating a more complex whole (Johnston, 1986, pp. 90-91). Mindfulness and its importance in transformation is still something I am refining within my own sense of self, but I hope that soon it will become a part of the larger whole that is me.

Chrysalis ends ambiguously. It could be when the dancers leave or when I turn the lights out or when space is again empty. This ambiguous ending serves as a metaphor for the acknowledgment that this experience and transformation is only one part of a larger whole and that the cycle repeats and continues endlessly. Finally, this part of the cycle is the embodiment, acknowledgment, and acceptance of change, but also the acknowledgment that that change is only one part of a larger rhythm (Johnston, 1986, pp. 90-91), and, that there really is no ending in this cycle.

Conclusions

Through the process of making *Chrysalis* I was able to begin to explore tools for achieving mindfulness. I learned that through conscious and intentional breath, I could not only become more aware of the moment, I could also use that awareness of breath to change my physical and emotional states. I found that through mindful repetition, I was able to notice subtle changes in my physical and mental states and use that information as a means of listening to the dance. In addition, I learned that through modalities such as authentic movement, I could cultivate a kinesthetic awareness of the present, deepening my own experience of mindfulness and allow the dance to surface out of that presence.

While *Chrysalis* did not experience as dramatic and immediate transformation as *Firewall,* change happened incrementally over time. The piece transformed, but it was a softer transformation, one that happened inside of deep awareness.

Through the performance of *Chrysalis,* I was able to come to a greater understanding of my own process throughout my creative research. Through the mindful embodiment of the piece, I was able to process the experience and the way in which the practice of mindfulness aided in the transformation of not only my creative works, but also my approach to the creative process. I no longer felt the need to focus so heavily on the structure of the piece, but was able to fall back into the present and trust that the moment would be there to catch me.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness as a Practice for Transformation

Through the process of making *Firewall* and *Chrysalis,* I came to a fuller understanding of the importance of mindfulness in the process of transformation. I discovered that focusing on the present moment would enable embodied change and even transformation. I also discovered that mindfulness is a practice and not something that can be taken for granted.

I accept that my original idea that individuals would be more mindful if they valued transitions and transitional space was only a part of a larger whole, which took for granted that people are present in the "main events," such as appointments, classes or meetings. It could even be argued that there are no main events and that we are constantly in transition—that being present and mindful means being open to constant transition.

Through my creative research, I found that being mindful during the entirety of the process allowed me to embody the constant transition of life and experience a fuller sense of transformation when it does occur. In the process of making *Firewall,* I

discovered that when I used the structure of the piece as a bandage to cover my fears about the outcome of the piece and choreographed the ending of the piece before it began, I actually shortchanged *Firewall*. By allowing the structure to become paramount to the content within the piece, the choreography as a whole became flat and uninteresting. I realized that in order to really listen to what a piece had to say, I had to give in to the moment (and those fears) and allow myself the time and space to be present within it. Through the process of *Firewall,* I learned that once I allowed time and space, as well as my fears, into the rehearsal process, I was able to be mindful of what was actually happening and make decisions from there, instead of what I may have decided weeks before or where I thought the piece should be at the end.

The lessons I learned in the creation of *Firewall* served as my starting place for the process of making *Chrysalis.* I began the rehearsal process for *Chrysalis* by intentionally making a time and space for myself to be present with the piece. Based on what I learned in *Firewall* about the role of mindfulness, I actively sought out ways of practicing being in the moment. I found that yogic philosophy, improvisation, and authentic movement aided me not only in being present, but also in the process of really feeling the piece I was creating. In addition, I found that breath aided me in my practice of mindfulness. I discovered that once I was able to find presence in the moment, I was able to move forward making decisions that fully embodied the moment.

Implications for my Career as a Choreographer and Teacher

My enhanced understanding of mindfulness in the transformation process through this thesis will continue to affect my future as a choreographer, performer and teacher. As

a choreographer, I see myself using some of the techniques I used in *Chrysalis* to create choreography in the future. Realizing the importance of mindfulness in the creative process, I will make the time and space for myself before rehearsals with other people to locate myself in the moment. Because I prefer to use a collaborative process within my choreography, I will also modify these techniques to help my dancers find their own sense of mindfulness at the beginning of the rehearsal period. This may be as simple as a short authentic movement session or reading and reflecting on a quote as inspiration for the day's rehearsal. I will also continue to look for other ways to aid the dancers in finding mindfulness.

During the process of making a new piece, I will make sure to take the time to check in with the dancers for their sense of the choreography. When I worked with Frampton and Adler to layer fire qualities on their solo phrases in *Firewall,* we were able to come to a greater understanding of the movement and its embodiment together. As a result, this kind of check-in is something I plan to continue.

I will continue to practice my own mindfulness not just in the rehearsal period, but over the whole creative process of a piece. My aim in creating new works will be to be present in the moment and to allow transformation of the process or of the piece to occur when it is ready or needed. If I begin to sense that one part of the piece is smothering the possibilities of the piece, I will use similar tactics as I used in *Firewall,* such as allowing a trusted colleague to work with the piece or letting go of it completely. Instead of allowing my fears about the outcome of a piece to dictate my entire process, I will yield to uncertainty and channel that energy into listening to the dance that wants to be made.

As a teacher, I plan to use these same concepts in planning and teaching classes. While planning my classes, I will be present with what I feel is an effective build for the class, what exercises seem to be the most relevant, and how I would want to present that material. At the same time, while actually in the classroom studio, I will practice the same sense of mindfulness, measuring the present moment for myself and for my students so that I will be able to sense when a combination needs to change or even transform from the original plan.

For my students, I hope to create a space where they can allow themselves to be fully present. I plan to do this not only within the structuring of the class, but in the entirety of the class, from the exercises to the way in which I offer suggestions. Exercises I might choose to use could include awareness improvisations where I would ask the students to sense their own kinesthetic and emotional responses and to act from there. Other examples might simply be to begin class with a meditation laying on the floor which eventually moves into movement or an exercise that reinforces breath patterning, such as moving with their inhale or exhale. When working with set combinations, I may ask the students to bring their awareness to the sensation the movements create by having them close their eyes or even just face away from the mirror. In addition, using words that focus students' attention on the present moment, such as surrender and trust, will aid in creating this kind of environment. In addition, my hope is that through the repetition of these kinds of words, students will begin to integrate and embody them into their minds but also into how they approach movement and perhaps even life.

Impact on My Life

In the world outside of the studio, I plan to continue building on the discoveries I made in the studio during my thesis process. I will need to make time and space for it by continually reminding myself to stay present, not to dwell on the past or the future. I will continue to develop the ability to stay present even in uncomfortable moments as well as in the face of uncertainty in daily life, because just as I run the risk of shortchanging my creative process by focusing so heavily on the future out of fear, in life I jeopardize missing experiences and opportunities that arise moment to moment. In addition, by bringing a higher level of awareness to the present moment in everyday life, I can more accurately gauge my own reactions to events as they occur and react accordingly. For example, even in the short time between the creative process and writing this thesis, I have been implementing many of the ideas of being aware and present and have already found that I actually feel more, see more, and experience more. Instead of constantly speeding through days in a future-induced haze, I have been able to just experience the moment. By allowing myself the space to acknowledge my fears, admitting that they exist, and working through them, rather than glossing over them, I can better gauge my own needs at that specific moment in time. From that place of gauging and acting, I have been able to trust that change will happen when the time is right. I am learning that I don't have to rely solely on the structure of life (schedules, plans, appointments) as catalysts of change, but that I can use those in conjunction with what is happening in the moment. This is not a process I have perfected or expect to ever perfect, but rather a practice that I am bringing not only into the studio, but into my life. I know I will have to

continually remind myself to trust that when I can surrender to the moment, transformation will happen when the time is right.

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